

## **BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG**

### **COUNCIL MINUTES**

**FEBRUARY 18, 2016 - 7:30 P.M.**

**MAYOR'S STATEMENT:** Mayor Pote called the meeting to order at 7:47 P.M. and made the following statement: Under the provisions of N.J.S.A.10:4-6 et seq., notice of the time and place of this meeting was given by way of annual notice to the Courier News, Echoes Sentinel, and Star Ledger, and posted at Borough Hall.

**SALUTE TO THE FLAG and a MOMENT OF SILENCE FOR OUR SERVICE MEN AND WOMEN, SERVING HOME AND ABROAD.**

#### **ROLL CALL:**

Joren [ P ]   Black [P]   Nehls [P]   Gibbs [P]   Mobus [P]   Sopko [P]

Also present were Clerk Michelle DeRocco, Borough Engineer Tom Herits, and Executive Assistant Shelini Parikh.

There were approximately 36 members of the public present.

Mayor Pote deviated from the agenda and introduced Rob Walton from JCP&L to speak briefly about JCP&L's distribution trimming policy. He advised that JCP&L is required to send formal notification which requires signatures from Borough Administration prior to proceeding with trimming.

#### **SPECIAL PRESENTATION -Arcari & Iovino Architects / Proposed Library Options**

Mayor Pote said the library issue has been "long and coming" and has been lingering since 2001. He explained the format for tonight's presentation and said that he would allow the public to ask questions at the end but requested that the questions best utilize Mr. Iovino's time. Both the Mayor and Councilman Nehls thanked Mr. Iovino for his hard work and time.

Mr. Iovino explained that he was directed by the Governing Body to provide preliminary plans and costs for renovations to the library to address fire safety & structural issues, increase library space and address any ADA violations. Mr. Iovino had provided handouts that were made available to the public prior to the meeting and had also displayed a power point presentation to demonstrate the layout of each plan. He reviewed the existing plan of the Watchung Library and the 4 proposed plans for renovations titled A, B, C and D. Plan A proposed repurposing the DPW barn and Library attic and therefore increasing the square footage to 12,644. Plan B included the repurposing of the DPW barn with an unoccupied attic which offers 11,020 square feet. Plan C was described as the most efficient configuration that would address all concerns and would be within the allocated budget. This plan excluded utilizing the DPW barn and attic and offered 8,657 square feet. Plan D varied significantly from the other options since it included the reframing of the building to provide an open layout that included 9,974 square feet which excluded the use of the barn and attic. Upon completing his presentation, Mr. Iovino answered a series of questions from the Governing Body and the Borough Engineer. The Mayor allowed the public to come forward with inquiries at this time.

Tom Franklin, Wildwood Terrace, had requested that Mr. Iovino to expand on the flexibility for the future on renovating a house versus proceeding with Plan D. Mr. Iovino advised that Plans A, B & C have limitations of the center stairs and that Plan D provides an open layout that offers flexibility.

John Sphunder, Ellison Rd, questioned whether the proposed costs for Plan A, B, C and D include soft costs and was advised by Mr. Iovino that the proposed figures do not include soft costs. Mr. Sphunder projected that soft costs would be around \$400,000 to \$500,000 and that there was already a referendum that voted down the library. He expressed concerns about projected future spending of the Fire Department and their inability to handle fire calls in a timely manner. He suggested that the Governing Body consider a paid fire department and suggested that the Borough fix more important problems before considering renovating the library. The Mayor requested that Mr. Sphunder focus on the topic at hand.

Virginia Hartmann, 56 Ellison Road, explained that several costs that some residents were concerned about would be covered in part by the County Library (soft costs, additional staffing). Mrs. Hartmann referenced a proposed bill for the New Jersey Library Construction Bond Act and explained how it would offer state funding to municipalities seeking to remodel/renovate libraries with a 1:1 matching ratio. She asked Mr. Iovino what plan he would envision as matching the proposed legislation and Mr. Iovino had responded that he is a proponent of Libraries and therefore recommends Plan D because it offers flexibility. Mrs. Hartmann concluded by asking the Governing Body to work with the Library supporters by helping to push for the passage of the proposed bill.

Wendy Ruta, Orchard Rd., expressed her concerns regarding the functionality of the library and her desire to have a multifunctional space. She asked Mr. Iovino if he felt that the Borough is limiting themselves by trying to force the proposed library into an existing vertical site and if the Borough would be allocating additional funding to make the library work in the existing space. Mr. Iovino explained that he was charged to review existing building at its current site, however the downside of the building's vertical structure is having to account for an elevator & stairs (approximately 1,500 sq. ft.) and that the issue was not about costs, but instead about space.

Lynda Goldshein, Sherwood Drive, expressed her views on remodeling the library and felt that the Borough should consider new construction, similar to Plan D. She informed the Governing Body that there is seepage in front of the Library and inquired if the bathrooms in the proposed plans are handicap accessible. Mr. Iovino advised that all of the bathrooms would be ADA compliant.

Debra Downs, High Tor Dr., inquired about the longevity of Plans A, B, C and D and was advised by Mr. Iovino that it was the same for all plans. Mrs. Downs then inquired if the fire safety was the same in all plans and was informed that there was no difference between the plans. She asked if there was the possibility in the future to build a second floor on the children's wing and Mr. Iovino explained that his proposed plans kept the budget in mind and that her idea was possible, however very expensive.

Pete Martino, Sunbright Dr., asked about the occupancy of the Library with the proposed plans. Mr. Iovino explained that he has not completed the calculations yet, and did attempt to maximize the occupancy by including two exits per meeting room. Mr. Martino inquired about the parking situation at the library and expressed his disapproval of the current location of the library. The Governing Body asked Mr. Martino if he had any suggestions for relocating the Library, which he did not.

Mrs. Downs questioned whether the Borough entertained the thought of knocking down the Art Center and the Mayor advised that it is not a consideration at this time.

Howard Greenbaum, Johnston Drive, questioned whether the library can be relocated to Camp Endeavor and was advised Camp Endeavor is Green Acres.

Tom Franklin, Wildwood Terrace, expressed his views on the various plans and felt that Plan D was the only one designed to be an actual Library and addressed the future needs of a Library. He explained that he understood that there are budget constraints but felt that it shouldn't be the single force driving this. He stated that there would be a future tax reduction in 2017 since the debt service from the Board of Education project that cost taxpayers \$2 million annually would be paid off and felt that there was plenty of room for the Borough to do something affordable and decent for this town.

John Sphunder, Ellisen Road, inquired why the Borough is not building the library on the Ness Property, and Councilman Nehls explained that the Ness property is zoned as Green Acres.

Ira Dicken, Scott Drive, discussed the prevailing wage that the Borough would be obligated to pay to the contractors and said it would increase the cost of the project. He urged the Governing body to look at other innovative options for construction such as pre-fabricated construction.

Howard Greenbaum, Johnston Drive, said that Tom Franklin's comments were not an appropriate comparison since the \$2 million BOE debt payment that he had referenced was a result of a referendum, and the Borough's Library referendum was voted down by the residents.

Lynda Goldshein, Sherwood Drive, said the Governing Body should not consider relocating the library to the Ness property, given the close proximity to the Warren Library.

## **REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEES:**

1. Administration & Finance - Councilman Gibbs announced that the Borough had concluded their bond sale for \$8.70 million and there were 5 bidders, the lowest rate being 2.23017%. He thanked the Council for having faith in the Borough's professionals and Administration & Finance Committee. He reported that the Borough received a great rating of AA Positive from Standards & Poor's (S&P) and was very pleased with the content in the report. He advised that S&P left the door open for the Borough to achieve a rating of AA+ if the Borough agrees to complete some items. Councilman Gibbs expressed his satisfaction in the Borough's efforts to be financially responsible and informed the Governing Body that the 2016 Budget has been distributed and asked for them to review it. He briefly reviewed some variations in the proposed budget for 2016. Councilmen Mobus and Gibbs discussed the increase in surplus and advised that the Borough is breaking away from utilizing surplus to help lower taxes. Councilman Gibbs concluded his report by announcing a grant award of \$3,125. from the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP.)
2. Police- Commissioner Joren had no report.

3. Public Works / Buildings and Grounds - Councilman Nehls thanked Building & Grounds Committee for their efforts on the Library. He commended the Public Works staff for their hard work in clearing the snow after the Storm Jonas and reported that the DPW staff had been out salting 5 times since January 21<sup>st</sup> using approximately 300 tons of salt. He also reported that the DPW staff had changed light bulbs throughout Borough buildings, moved furniture at the Library upon request and had cleared sidewalks at the Lake and School paths.

4. Public Affairs:

Open Space - Councilman Sopko advised that there was no report and that he intended on scheduling a meeting in March.

Environmental- Councilman Sopko advised that the next meeting is scheduled for the following week and the Pilgrim Pipeline would be discussed.

Recreation - Councilman Mobus said he would present his report at the next meeting.

Historical - Councilman Mobus said he would present his report at the next meeting.

Board of Health - Councilman Black had no Report.

5. Fire- Councilman Black had no report.

6. Laws/Ordinances - Councilwoman Joren advised that the Laws & Ordinances Committee meeting was scheduled for 6:30, however due to the special meeting that just concluded earlier, she had to re-schedule.

**REPORTS - OTHER:**

7. Engineer – Mr. Herits reported that the Knollwood / Deer Run project was 50% complete. He also reported that he would like the Building & Grounds Committee to schedule a meeting to discuss the generator.

8. Police Chief - Chief Cina reported that the dispatchers had completed their training and the prior experience the candidates possess was helpful in the transition. He advised that the PD received 140 resumes of which 30 candidates were interviewed and 12 finalists were called back for a second interview. The Chief advised that he hopes to have a decision made by the next meeting and concluded by announcing that County Prosecutor Soriano was replaced with Michael Robertson.

9. Fire Department - No Report

10. Rescue Squad – Squad member Ben Dorkin provided the monthly report that included data on calls received and attended to.

11. Emergency Management - No Report

12. Attorney - Mr. Cruz advised that he had no report, however did have one item for discussion in Executive Session.

13. Clerk- Mrs. DeRocco had no report.

14. Administrator - No Report

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**PUBLIC PORTION / AGENDA ITEMS ONLY**

None

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**UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

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**NEW BUSINESS**

**CONSENT AGENDA:** Consent Agenda Items listed below were unanimously adopted following a motion by Council President Joren and a second by Councilman Nehls and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Joren, Black, Nehls, Gibbs, Mobus, Sopko, “aye.”

Approval of the following Council minutes:

February 4, 2016 Special Meeting, Regular and Executive Sessions  
February 4, 2016

Acknowledging Receipt of the following Borough Reports:

Building Department Report – January 2016  
Finance Department Revenue Report – December 2015

None

R1:2/18/16 Appointment to Library Advisory Board – Eileen Dicken

R2: Authorize 2016 Contract – Middle-Brook Regional Health Commission

R3: Authorize Appointment of Representative to Somerset County Municipal  
Wastewater Management Committee – Albert Ellis

R4: Purchases Over \$2,000. – O2 Sports (Recreation Basketball Uniforms)

Councilman Gibbs introduced Resolution R5, and made the following statement: “I am voting in the affirmative for all items on the Bill List, but recusing myself on the purchase of energy commodity, due to his employment with an energy commodity supplier...” Council President Joren seconded the motion and upon Roll Call the vote was as follows: Joren, Black, Nehls, Gibbs, Mobus, Sopko, “aye.

R5:02/18/16    Payment of Bills

No one from the Public in attendance.

Mayor Pote advised that he attended a meeting with several other Mayors (approximately 20) regarding the Pilgrim Pipeline and that they were able secure legal counsel, Scarinci Hollenbeck, to represent participating municipalities. He reported that the Borough's portion of the fee is \$5,000 and would include model ordinances along with long term needs.

Council President Joren offered the following Resolution, Councilman Nehls seconded the motion and upon Roll Call the vote was as follows: Joren, Black, Nehls, Gibbs, Mobus, Sopko, “aye.”

R6: Executive Session: Litigation – In the Matter of the Borough of Watchung for a Judgment of Compliance of its Third Round Housing Element and Fair Share Plan, Docket No. SOM-L-902-15

The Borough Council may take official action on those items discussed in executive session upon completion of the executive session.

## ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Council, the meeting was adjourned at 10:50 PM to the Call of the Chair, and to the next meeting of the Mayor and Council, a Special Meeting to be held on Wednesday, March 2, 2016 at 7:00 P.M., and then the regularly scheduled Council meeting to be held on Thursday, March 3, 2016, at 7:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Michelle DeRocco, RMC  
Clerk